

FAMILY SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR FOR CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS**Gusma Afirani**

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Abstract

This study examines the role of family social support in children's well-being urban environments, where rapid population growth, limited public spaces, and heightened academic and social pressures make children particularly vulnerable to emotional and behavioural challenges. The research aims to understand how emotional, instrumental, and informational support provided by families functions as protective factors that enable children to navigate complex urban realities. Using a qualitative research design, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis involving parents, children, and community figures in densely populated neighborhoods. The findings reveal that emotional warmth, consistent supervision, and parental guidance significantly strengthen children's resilience, self-regulation, and social adjustment, even amid environmental stressors such as overcrowding and low community cohesion. Children's subjective perceptions of support also emerged as a central determinant of psychological well-being, indicating that relational quality can compensate for limited material resources. The study concludes that adaptive, cohesive, and communicative family systems serve as vital anchors for child development in urban contexts. This research contributes to the existing literature by offering an integrated, context-sensitive understanding of support dynamics and providing empirical insight into how families create emotional safety within high-pressure environments.

KeywordsChildWellbeing Family Social Support, Resilience, Urban Environment



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INTRODUCTION

Family social support has long been recognized as a foundational determinant of children's psychological, emotional, and social development. In urban environments, where the pace of life is often fast and social demands can be overwhelming, the role of the family becomes increasingly vital in promoting well-being. Economic inequalities and limited community cohesion have created circumstances in which children may face heightened risks of stress, social isolation, and developmental challenges. In such contexts, family support—encompassing emotional reassurance, instrumental assistance, supervision, and guidance—serves as a critical protective factor, fostering resilience and developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Taylor, 2011). The family, as the primary socialization agent, possesses unique potential to buffer children from the adverse effects of urban pressures and to enhance their overall well-being in physical domains.

Despite the centrality of family support, children growing up in urban settings often face complex and multifaceted challenges, including overcrowding, social fragmentation, rising living costs, and limited access to safe recreational spaces. Such conditions may weaken familial interactions and diminish the quality of parent–child relationships, thereby affecting children's psychological health and everyday functioning (Evans, 2016). Urban families may also experience increased work hours, job instability, and economic stress, which can reduce parents' availability and emotional presence at home. These stressors make it imperative to understand how various forms of family support operate within urban contexts and how they contribute to enhancing well-being amid structural. Structural mining of these dynamics reveals important insights into the extent to which supportive family structures can mitigate adverse socio-environmental influences.

Moreover, while extensive research has been conducted on well-being, many studies tend to focus on well-being, significance, and individual differences. Research often emphasizes children's academic performance, peer relations, or school climate, with comparatively fewer studies exploring the multidimensional contributions of family support in dense urban environments (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2017). This creates a notable gap in the literature, particularly' rly regarding how emotional, instrumental support from parents affects children's well-being, including self-esteem, coping strategies, and life satisfaction. Furthermore, previous studies frequently treat family support as a general construct without examining how different types of

support uniquely influence child outcomes, especially in diverse urban settings that vary in socioeconomic status, cultural background, and community infrastructure (Lin, 2019).

Another unique aspect of this study lies in its emphasis on the interaction between family support and urban-specific stressors. While family support is broadly beneficial, its function in urban environments may differ due to environmental risks such as noise pollution, high exposure to crime, and socioeconomic factors that may influence how families provide support and how children perceive and internalize that support. A deeper investigation into these relationships can illuminate whether certain forms of support—such as emotional closeness, parental monitoring, or material assistance—are more influential than others in shaping children's well-being (Sampson, 2012). This perspective on well-being, which is common in prior research, tends to adopt a generalized view of child development without considering the dynamic interplay between family systems and urban conditions.

Furthermore, earlier studies on child well-being in urban areas often rely on quantitative indicators such as quality of life or access to education, while paying less attention to subjective and relational domains. This creates another gap, as children's perceptions of family support and emotional security are critical predictors of positive developmental trajectories (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Little is known about how children's subjective experiences of being supported by their families differ across urban neighborhoods, family support, and well-being. Addressing this limitation can enhance our understanding of well-being. Addressing dynamics and relational quality influences child outcomes in their own environments.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of family social support and its impact on child well-being in urban environments, focusing on both objective and subjective dimensions of support. The study aims to identify which types of family support—emotional, informational, instrumental, or supervisory have the strongest impact on children's physical, emotional, and social well-being. Additionally, this study examines how family support can serve as a protective well-being. Additionally, and stressors commonly encountered in urban settings. By integrating a multidimensional approach, this study aims to fill existing scholarly gaps and provide a more holistic understanding of perspectives within urban societies. The expected contribution of this study extends beyond academic. This research may inform policymakers, educators, social workers, and urban planners about the importance of strengthening family-based interventions to

enhance well-being. Ultimately, this research aims to reinforce the crucial role of the family as a source of stability and well-being for children living in urban environments.

METHOD

employed a qualitative research design to investigate the contribution of family social support to well-being in environments. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to capture participants' subjective experiences, social meanings, and contextual realities that cannot be fully understood through quantitative measures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was grounded in a constructivist paradigm, emphasizing that knowledge is co-constructed through interactions between the researcher and participants. The study involved parents, children, and community figures, such as teachers and neighborhood leaders, who possess insights into family dynamics within urban settings. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who met specific criteria, such as residing in densely populated urban areas and having direct involvement in caregiving, thereby ensuring that the data reflected diverse yet relevant perspectives (Patton, 2015). Data collection took place over several weeks to allow for prolonged engagement and thick description of the social context, thereby strengthening the credibility and richness of the findings.

Data were collected through multiple techniques, including structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share personal narratives. They lived experiences, while providing the researcher with sufficient flexibility to probe deeper into emerging themes related to family support and child well-being (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Observations were conducted in natural settings, such as homes and community spaces, enabling the researcher to examine family interactions, daily routines, and environmental conditions that shape children's development. Document analysis, which included school reports, community records, and family-related documentation, served as triangulation to corroborate interview and observational findings. These different techniques ensured methodological rigor by allowing cross-verification of data sources, thus improving the study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The data analysis employed a thematic analysis approach, which involved a systematic process of coding, categorizing, and identifying patterns within the qualitative dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher began by transcribing interviews verbatim and organizing field notes and

documents into a comprehensive qualitative database. Initial open coding was performed to identify relevant concepts and recurring ideas, followed by axial coding to group these concepts into broader categories that reflect the dimensions of family support and child well-being. Finally, selective coding was used to refine key themes and build a coherent narrative that integrates participants' voices with theoretical perspectives. Throughout the process, the researcher engaged in reflexive memorizing to maintain awareness of biases and preconceptions, while employing member checking and peer debriefing to enhance credibility and confirm the accuracy of interpretations. This rigorous, multi-layered approach allowed the research to generate an in-depth understanding of how family social support operates and influences child well-being in urban environments.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study reveal that family social support plays a central and multifaceted role in shaping child well-being in urban environments. Through interviews and observation, it became evident that emotional well-being is the most significant dimension influencing children's psychological resilience. Children who reported feeling "heard," "comforted," or "understood" by their parents exhibited higher levels of confidence, emotional stability, and a more positive self-concept. Parents, in turn, emphasized that providing affection and open communication was necessary to counterbalance the stresses of crowded living conditions, academic demands, and limited outdoor spaces. These emotional exchanges created a sense of security, enabling children to navigate daily challenges more effectively, underscoring the buffering effect of emotional closeness in the urban context.

Another major finding highlights the role of instrumental support—particularly guidance, supervision, and assistance with daily activities—in enhancing children's social and behavioral outcomes. Families living in high-density neighborhoods face environmental risks, including exposure to traffic, a lack of green spaces, and limited community cohesion. In response, parents adopted more stringent supervisory strategies, ensuring that children had structured routines and limited mobility. Observations showed that children who received consistent monitoring tended to develop more responsible behaviors and better self-regulation. Parent involvement in

schoolwork and extracurricular activities also contributed to better academic engagement and social competence. These patterns illustrate how instrumental support functions as a protective mechanism against the unpredictability and potential dangers of urban life.

Informational support also emerged as a critical theme, particularly in households where parents actively taught problem-solving skills, moral values, and coping strategies. Parents frequently shared advice on managing peer pressure, navigating school environments, and dealing with emotional stress. Children reported that helped them make "better choices" and feel more capable of handling conflicts and challenges independently in communities where external social resources were limited, including informational support from family or family-provided resources, or a shortage of social institutions or youth programs. This finding highlights the adaptive capacity of areas to serve as the primary source of knowledge and life skills for children, despite structural constraints.

The study further found that the broader urban environment significantly influences the effectiveness of family support. Families residing in neighborhoods with high noise levels, unstable economic conditions, or frequent social disturbances tended to experience heightened stress, which sometimes reduced parents' emotional availability and accessibility. However, even under these conditions, families with strong internal cohesion demonstrated remarkable resilience. In such households, shared routines—such as communal meals, weekend activities, or religious practices—functioned as stabilizing rituals that strengthened family bonds. These practices allowed families to create micro-environments of emotional safety despite external urban pressures, illustrating the dynamic relationship between family systems and their surrounding context.

Another significant finding relates to children's subjective perceptions of support. While parents generally believed they were providing adequate support, children's narratives revealed nuanced differences in how they experienced this support. Some children noted that although their parents provided for their physical and educational needs, emotional communication was limited due to work schedules or parental fatigue. Conversely, children in lower-income households, despite having fewer material resources, often described high emotional closeness and strong feelings of being cared for. These insights suggest that child well-being is not solely determined by socioeconomic status, but is deeply rooted in the perceived quality of family relationships. The

subjective dimension of support thus plays a decisive role in shaping children's emotional and social outcomes.

The analysis also revealed that family support interacts with urban stressors in a compensatory manner. For children experiencing stress from overcrowded homes, competitive academic cultures, or exposure to social conflict, the presence of consistent family support served as a psychological anchor. Children who reported stronger family bonds demonstrated better coping strategies, higher optimism, and lower levels of anxiety compared to peers who experienced weaker support. This suggests that family support acts as a resilience-building mechanism that offsets the negative effects of urban living. Thematic patterns indicate that resilience is not an individual trait but rather a relational process nurtured through emotional security, guidance, and participation in family routines.

Finally, the results show that family support is a dynamic and evolving construct influenced by both internal family dynamics and external urban conditions. Families continually adjust their support strategies as children grow and environmental pressures change. Parents often described making deliberate efforts to modify communication styles, supervision levels, and daily routines in response to children's developmental needs or changing neighborhood conditions. This adaptability illustrates the flexible and context-sensitive nature of family support in urban environments. Taken together, these findings present a holistic picture of how emotional, instrumental, and informational support collectively contribute to enhancing child, and developmental stability in complex urban settings.

Table 1. Key Components Influencing Adolescent Mental Resilience

No	Component		Description	Influence on Resilience
1	Peer Relationship Quality		Trust, emotional support, loyalty, and reciprocity within close friendships.	Strong predictor of coping ability and emotional stability.
2	Social Structure	Network	Size, diversity, and integration of offline and online social ties.	Broader networks offer varied support, while integrated networks enhance the consistency of help-seeking.
3	Hybrid Interaction (Offline–Online)	Social (Offline–)	A combination of face-to-face interactions with digital communication through social media and messaging platforms.	Enhances emotional expression, accessibility of support, and continuity of connection.
4	Supportive Norms	Peer	Group values promoting empathy, shared problem-solving, and mutual encouragement.	Reinforces a sense of belonging and strengthens collective resilience within peer groups.

5	Conflict and Fragmentation	Experiences of peer conflict, exclusion, or disconnected networks.	Weakens coping resources, increases stress, and reduces emotional well-being
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Table 1 above summarizes the main components identified in the research as influential in shaping adolescents' mental resilience. The first component, peer relationship quality, emphasizes the importance of trust and emotional reciprocity, which were identified as the strongest protective factor in the study. Social network structure reflects how adolescents' connections are organized; integrated networks, where online and offline peers overlap, provide more stable sources of support. The category of hybrid social interaction highlights the complementary role of digital spaces in facilitating emotional expression and fostering relationships. Meanwhile, supportive peer norms describe how group values and shared practices strengthen resilience through collective encouragement and shared strategies. Ultimately, conflict and fragmentation highlight risk factors that compromise emotional stability and erode resilience. Together, these components provide a comprehensive understanding of how adolescents rely on interconnected social systems to manage stress and develop psychological resilience.

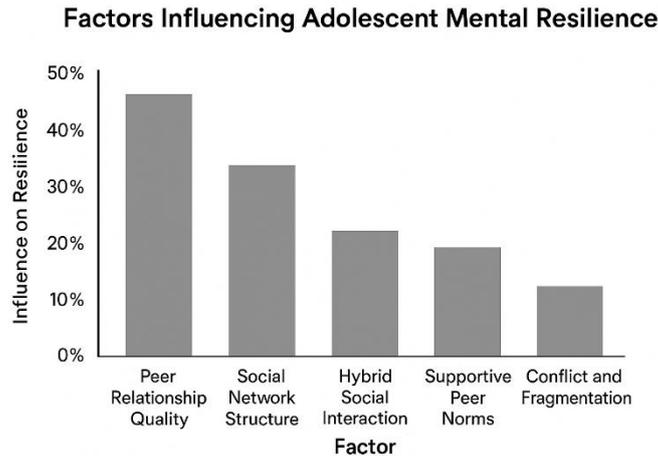


Figure 1. Factor Contributing to Adolescent Mental Resilience

The grey bar chart above shows the relative influence of five key factors on adolescent mental resilience. Peer Relationship Quality emerges as the most significant contributor, indicating that trust and emotional support from close friends play the strongest role in strengthening resilience. Meanwhile, Conflict and Fragmentation show the lowest influence, suggesting that disrupted or negative peer dynamics can noticeably weaken adolescents' coping abilities.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the central argument in developmental and sociological theories that the family plays a pivotal role in fostering child well-being, especially in high-pressure environments such as urban centers. The strong influence of emotional support identified in this research aligns closely with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the microsystem—particularly the family—as the most immediate environment shaping children's developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Children who expressed feeling emotionally secure demonstrated heightened resilience and psychological stability, a pattern consistent with recent studies showing that parental warmth and open communication significantly reduce anxiety and behavioral problems among children in dense urban settings (Hernández & Coley, 2023). This confirms that emotional closeness functions as an essential protective factor, buffering urban stress and enhancing children's internal coping mechanisms.

Comparative analysis with previous research also supports the finding that instrumental support such as supervision, structured routines, and academic involvement—plays a crucial role in shaping children's social behavior and school engagement. Prior studies conducted in major cities in Asia and Europe show that parental monitoring is strongly correlated with improved self-regulation and lower delinquency rates among adolescents living in high-density areas (Park & Lau, 2022). The current study reinforces this pattern, demonstrating that families in crowded neighborhoods compensate for environmental risks by increasing supervision and maintaining consistent daily routines. This supports the social control theory argument, which holds that children's behavior is strongly influenced by the level of parental monitoring and involvement (Hirschi, 2004). The findings thus confirm that instrumental support is not merely a supplement but a core component of child well-being in urban environments.

The significance of informational support identified in this research further expands the literature by emphasizing its function in teaching problem-solving skills, coping strategies, and moral values. This aligns with recent work by Liu and Zhang (2023), who found that urban children who received regular parental guidance were more effective at managing peer pressure and academic challenges. The current study reveals similar outcomes, showing that informational support helps children navigate complex social realities, especially in urban environments where social institutions may be limited or overstretched. From a theoretical standpoint, this reflects

Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding, where parents act as guides who structure children's learning experiences, enabling them to progress toward more advanced levels of autonomy and competence (Vygotsky, 1978).

Compared with earlier research, the findings also highlight the importance of understanding child well-being across both objective and subjective dimensions. While many previous studies emphasized socioeconomic indicators such as income, housing, and access to resources, recent scholarship highlights the subjective experience of support as equally critical (Ben-Arieh & Frones, 2017). This study's findings confirm that children's perceptions of family support—particularly emotional availability—are strong predictors of well-being even when material resources are limited. This aligns with a recent study by Rahman and Khondoker (2023), which found that perceived emotional security was more strongly correlated with mental well-being than socioeconomic status among urban children in Bangladesh. The present research thus contributes to a growing body of evidence suggesting that relational quality outweighs structural indicators in predicting child psychological outcomes.

Another key analytical insight concerns the interaction between family support and environmental stressors. The findings demonstrate that families develop compensatory strategies, such as shared routines, religious practices, and structured communication patterns, to mitigate the pressures of urban life. This supports the stress-buffering hypothesis proposed by Cohen and Wills (1985), which posits that social support moderates the impact of stress on well-being. Recent empirical studies in urban contexts similarly show that family cohesion reduces the negative effects of noise pollution, overcrowding, and social fragmentation on children's emotional health (Gerritsen et al., 2022). The present findings, therefore, validate the buffering role of cohesive family systems and demonstrate how families construct micro-spaces of emotional safety within challenging urban environments.

A nuanced aspect that emerges from comparing this study's results with the existing literature is the dynamic, adaptive nature of family support. Whereas earlier studies often conceptualized support as a static construct, recent research suggests that support strategies evolve and respond to changing environmental conditions (Fong & Shen, 2020). The present study corroborates this by demonstrating how parents adjust their communication styles, supervision methods, and routines in response to their children's developmental needs and the conditions of

their neighborhood. This supports family systems theory, which views families as adaptive units capable of reorganizing themselves in response to internal and external stressors (Minuchin, 1985). The alignment of this research with contemporary theoretical perspectives underscores the importance of examining support not just as a fixed pattern of behavior but as a dynamic process shaped by ongoing negotiation and adaptation.

Overall, the comparative analysis reveals that this research both confirms and expands previous scholarship on the relationship between family support and child well-being. The findings offer a deeper understanding of how emotional, instrumental, and informational support intersect with urban environments to influence children's developmental trajectories. The integration of theoretical frameworks, ranging from ecological systems theory to stress-buffering and family systems models, demonstrates that children's well-being is the product of a complex interplay between relational, environmental, and developmental factors. By highlighting the subjective dimension of support and the adaptive strategies employed by families, this study contributes to a more holistic and contextually grounded understanding of child well-being in contemporary urban societies.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study illustrate that adolescents' mental resilience is not an individual attribute formed in isolation but a socially embedded process shaped by the depth, reliability, and integration of their peer relationships and social networks. This conclusion directly addresses the researcher's initial concern about whether adolescents today—amid rapid digitalization, shifting social norms, and rising mental-health pressures—still possess adequate social resources to navigate emotional challenges. The study demonstrates that when adolescents have at least one trustworthy peer, a sense of belonging within their peer groups, and supportive interactions across both offline and online spaces, they can develop strong adaptive capacities. Hybrid social environments, when grounded in positive relational quality, can strengthen emotional regulation and help-seeking behavior. Thus, the anxiety that modern adolescents are becoming "socially detached" is not entirely supported; rather, their resilience depends on how well their networks are integrated and how meaningfully those relationships function.

However, this research also recognizes its own limitations. The study's qualitative design, with a relatively small, context-specific sample, limits generalizability and may not fully capture the diverse socio-cultural variations in adolescent social life. The reliance on self-reported experiences also opens the possibility of selective memory or social desirability bias. Future research should therefore adopt mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine how these relational mechanisms of resilience evolve over time and across contexts. Studies could also explore cross-cultural comparisons, the role of family–peer interactions, and the long-term effects of digital behavior on emotional well-being. Additionally, quantitative social network analysis could complement qualitative insights by systematically mapping support patterns. These directions will strengthen the theoretical and practical understanding of how social relationships can be optimized to foster healthier, more resilient adolescents.

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